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SUBJECT: BAHAMAS TO SIGN SCHENGEN VISA WAIVER AGREEMENT

11. (U) The Bahamas will sign a Schengen Visa Waiver Agreement on June 1 during the European Union-African, Caribbean, Pacific State (EU-ACP) meeting in Brussels. The agreement allows visa-free travel for Bahamian citizens to 24 European countries party to the Schengen agreement. Governor General Arthur Hanna announced news of the agreement while accepting credentials from the newly appointed French Ambassador to The Bahamas on May 21. Hanna praised the EU for pushing the agreement forward.

12. (U) A Schengen Visa Waiver Agreement has been a priority issue for The Bahamas for some time. There are no EU diplomatic missions in The Bahamas and Bahamians must travel to third countries to apply for Schengen visas or incur expensive costs of sending visa documents to and from a third country. This agreement will make EU travel much easier for Bahamian citizens, many of whom view the visa process as a deterrent to travel. The Bahamas has recently seen an increase in activity with the EU, including signing an Economic Partnership Agreement in October 2008 and an increase in direct flights to and from European destinations. It is likely that Bahamian travel to the EU will increase as a result of this agreement.
ZUNIGA-BROWN